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ABSTRACT

The Boston (Massachusetts) Public Schools present a comprehensive plan designed to bring all students to an acceptable level of mastery to meet state requirements or their own new higher standards. For the first time in decades, all the elements of school reform are in place, with public and administrative support. The primary goal of the Boston Public Schools is to improve teaching and learning for all children. This comprehensive plan elaborates on this goal and presents additional goals for educational improvement. An integral part of reaching this goal will be the establishment of high standards, curricula, and assessments that measure achievement and improvement accurately. Implementation of a broad-based literacy effort and an increased use of technology will also be essential elements. The second goal of this comprehensive plan is to change the structure of the Boston Public Schools to focus on student performance and to serve the community. A third goal is to provide safe, nurturing, and healthy schools where students receive the support they need to succeed in school. The final essential goal is to engage parents and the community in school improvement through a unified collaborative structure and effective communication. In Boston, the Mayor, the Boston School Committee, and the collaborative partners in the city's education are poised to implement this comprehensive plan to make Boston's schools support teaching and learning. (SLD)

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ED 408 393

BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# Focus on Children

**A Comprehensive Reform Plan for the Boston Public Schools**

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## FOCUS ON CHILDREN

A Comprehensive Reform Plan
for the Boston Public Schools

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August 1996

# Focus on Children

**A Comprehensive Reform Plan for the Boston Public Schools**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

***In Boston,*** we have some of the best schools and classrooms in the nation, and some of the highest achieving young people in the state. But most of our graduates are not now able to perform at an adequate level of mastery to meet either state requirements or our own new, higher standards. For the first time in decades, the essential elements for reform are all in place. Our mission is ambitious, but within reach: to transform each of our schools into a community that provides a safe, motivating, and fully engaging learning climate, that sets the highest expectations for all students, and where all adults are committed to the success of every child.

*The Mission of the Boston Public Schools*

*We welcome the children of this city into the Boston Public Schools, where effective teaching and learning prepare all of our students to achieve at high levels, and where the entire community works together to focus on children.*

### OUR PRIMARY GOAL:
### Improve Teaching and Learning for All Children

The Comprehensive Reform Plan establishes one primary goal for all of our collective work, and three ancillary goals to support it. The primary goal is to improve teaching and learning in all of our schools. All of our efforts—from reorganizing central offices to seeking help from families, businesses, higher education institutions, and the community—are aimed at achieving this goal.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Primary Goal:** | **Improve teaching and learning to enable all students to achieve high standards of performance.** |
| Goal 2: | Change the structure of the Boston Public Schools to focus on student performance and to serve the community. |
| Goal 3: | Provide safe, nurturing, healthy schools where students receive the support they need to succeed in school. |
| Goal 4: | Engage parents and the community in school improvement through a unified, collaborative structure and effective communication. |

## Strategies to Improve Teaching and Learning

- **Establish high standards, curricula, and assessments.**

  Citywide Learning Standards will be established in each subject area with appropriate benchmarks at specific grades. Over the next five years, curricula in all subjects and all grades, K-12, that are rigorous, relevant and teacher-driven will be implemented in all schools. Assessments will include identifying short-term instruments and performance indicators that more accurately measure student achievement and improvement, as well as developing long-term, performance-based assessments.

- **Provide leadership development for all staff.**

  "Leadership" includes principals and headmasters, school site council members, teachers, parents, and key staff in each school. Training programs will focus on improving content and classroom practices. New curricula and assessments will change expectations for what students must know, how they learn, and how they demonstrate what they know. Teachers will be trained to be both problem posers and problem solvers, helping students learn independently and in groups. Best practices will be shared, and classroom management approaches will be developed that ensure respect for and responsiveness to the needs of all children.

  **The Center for Leadership Development** (CLD) is the central vehicle for providing professional development and leadership training for the Boston Public Schools. CLD is committed to providing opportunities for educators to continually explore their practice, challenge their assumptions about teaching and learning, expand content knowledge, and create self-sustaining communities among colleagues both within schools and across the district.

- **Plan and carry out whole-school change.**

  Achieving the higher standards will demand more focus and support from the entire community. To this end, every school will be expected to develop a plan for **whole-school change.** It will serve as a *single* planning document for Title I, Chapter 636, and all other planning requirements that in the past have required separate planning processes and documents. This will enable schools to change from being places where projects and programs have limited connections to one another, to places where a *unified, focused, data-driven* approach results in measurable school improvement.

  Development of a whole-school plan will require an extensive audit by each school involving the School Site Councils, as well as broad representation of the extended school community. Schools will be encouraged to identify successful models for innovation and to become engaged in professional networks of colleagues and schools also working with these models. A Comprehensive School Planning Team will help schools in this change process.

- **Support a broad-based literacy effort.**

  The City of Boston has committed itself to the goal of all students being able to read by third grade through *Read Boston*, a broad-based campaign to promote literacy throughout the community and to help families to support the instructional experiences of their children. Read Boston is a resource to our early learning centers and elementary schools. An essential feature of the City's aggressive commitment to literacy is the move to full-day kindergarten for all 5-year-olds. While this will require a shift in resources away from providing half-day Kindergarten 1 and 2 programs, the Boston Public Schools will work closely with community groups to expand educational opportunities for 4-year-olds.

■ **Increase the use of technology.**

Mayor Thomas Menino has set an ambitious goal of one computer for every four students. The Mayor's goal also calls for a computer for every teacher and a technology infrastructure linking every classroom to the world. Staff from the Boston Public Schools, the Boston Teachers Union, NYNEX, and an extensive list of representatives from business, education, community, parents, and city government have developed a broad strategy for expanding the access and use of technology throughout the Boston Public Schools. The technology plan also calls for training for teachers and staff, and an effective system of support and maintenance for existing and new technology.

## Supporting Improved Teaching and Learning

### GOAL 2: Change the structure of the Boston Public Schools to focus on student performance and to serve the community.

Strategies include fully implementing:

- The Reorganization Plan that changes the structure of the organization to a seamless K-12 system that is more focused on improving student performance.
- The educational reforms of the Boston Public Schools/Boston Teachers Union contract.
- An all-funds budgeting process that is zero-based, program-based, and school-based.

### GOAL 3: Provide safe, nurturing schools where students receive the support they need to succeed in school.

Strategies to provide safe, nurturing schools include:

- Establishing caring and secure school environments.
- Teaching violence prevention through mediation, conflict resolution and character education.
- Establishing integrated services for children and families, with linkages to community, health care, social services, and recreational providers.
- Continuing to improve the collaborative relationship between the Boston Public Schools and the key public safety organizations.
- Developing options for students who truly need them.

### GOAL 4: Engage parents and the community in school improvement through a unified collaborative structure and effective communication.

Strategies for public engagement include:

- Involving all partners in the whole school change process to effectively plan for more focus on teaching and learning.
- Planning and conducting an ongoing communications strategy for informing all constituencies of the status of the schools.

The Comprehensive Reform Plan connects the many different pieces of school reform to make the whole greater than its parts: high standards for student achievement, improvements in instructional practices, new forms of assessment, a plan for effective professional development, a thoughtful strategy for parent involvement, powerful school-based governance, accountability, fiscal responsibility, and public engagement. ■

# Focus on Children

## Contents


**What will Boston's schools of the 21st century look like?** ..... 8

I. **Guiding Principles** ..... 11

II. **Background: Creating a Climate for Learning throughout the City** ..... 12
A Community Ready for Change ..... 13
A Durable Structure for Collaboration ..... 13
A Strategy Focused on Teaching and Learning ..... 14

III. **Mission, Goals, and the Plan to Achieve Them** ..... 14
**Our Primary Goal:** *Improve teaching and learning.* ..... 16
1. Establish high standards. ..... 17
   - Citywide Learning Standards ..... 18
   - Interim Assessment ..... 19
2. Provide leadership development. ..... 20
   - The Center for Leadership Development ..... 21
   - Career in Teaching Program ..... 22
3. Plan and carry out whole-school change. ..... 22
   - Process for Whole-School Change ..... 23
   - School-Based Management/Shared Decision-Making ..... 25
   - School-to-Career ..... 25
   - Project-Based Learning ..... 26
   - Inclusion ..... 27
   - Pilot Schools ..... 27
4. Support a broad-based literacy effort. ..... 28
5. Increase the use of technology. ..... 28

**Supporting Improved Teaching and Learning** ..... 29
**Goal 2:** *Change the structure of the BPS to focus on student performance and serve the community.* ..... 29
1. Implement the reorganization plan. ..... 29
   - Principals/Headmasters as Educational Leaders ..... 30
   - Clusters of Schools ..... 30
   - Customer Service Orientation ..... 30

2. Fully implement the reforms of the Boston Teachers Union contract. ..... 31
3. Provide incentives for improvement. ..... 31
4. Fully implement an all-funds budgeting process. ..... 32
   • Alignment of Resources with Educational Priorities ..... 32
   • Zero-Based Budgeting ..... 32
   • Program-Based Budgets ..... 33
   • All-Funds Budgets ..... 33

**Goal 3:** *Provide safe, nurturing schools where students receive the support they need to succeed in school.* ..... 33
1. Establish attractive, caring and secure school environments. ..... 33
2. Emphasize violence prevention and character education. ..... 34
3. Establish integrated services for children and families. ..... 34
4. Improve relationships between the BPS and public safety organizations. ..... 35
5. Develop options for students who need them. ..... 37

**Goal 4:** *Engage parents and the community in school improvement.* ..... 37
1. Involve all partners in whole-school change. ..... 37
   • Alignment of Compact Goals and Comprehensive Reform Plan ..... 38
   • Collaborative Planning for Whole-School Change ..... 39
   • Focus for Resources through Partnerships ..... 39
2. Plan and conduct an ongoing communications strategy. ..... 40
   • Internal Communication ..... 41
   • External Communication—Media Relations ..... 42
   • Community, Families & Partners ..... 43

**IV. Conclusion** ..... **43**

# What will Boston's schools of the 21st century look like?

A *barely audible alarm* sounds inside the computer Cassandra is working on. She recognizes the signal as hers, not one of the other three students who share the machine with her. She sets the alarm to let her know when it's time to change classes. It's the second time her alarm has gone off, and she's going to have to hurry; she has only 20 minutes to get to her last class of the day—at a hospital three miles away.

Cass logs off the computer where she has been calculating a solution to a math problem. The intern from her school's partner college is conducting a seminar at one end of the classroom. The math teacher is working with a larger group of students at the other end. She sits in one of the desk chairs and asks questions of two students working at the blackboard. This teacher is very demanding; her expectations for Cass and the other students are very high. Around the room other students are still working on their computers.

The teacher sees Cass stand, glances at the clock on the wall and nods to her. Her math period is over. Cass and four other students leave the class and rush to catch the shuttle van downtown to the hospital. The school uses block scheduling and has worked with its business partner to develop an innovative modular scheduling approach that allows longer classes to be broken into smaller units for subsets of students.

On her way down the hall, Cass is stopped briefly by her friend James. Cass and James are both sixteen years old, in their second year at the high school. James has a learning disability; but like other students with Individualized Education Plans, James spends virtually all of his instructional time in regular education classes. James's mother is on the School Site Council. James is also a musician and takes classes at the conservatory downtown. James wants to know if Cass is going to have her presentation ready for their next English class.

### Making Connections to Improve Learning

James and Cass are part of a team of students working on a combined project for their English and history classes, organized around the school's instructional theme for the year. The theme integrates instruction in four major subject areas. This year's theme is Great Contributors: much of everyone's school work is connected to studying the biographies of important people. James chose Miles Davis as his "great contributor." Cass is studying the aviation pioneer Amelia Earhart because she saw a film about her on television and wanted to learn more about her.

When Cass told her mother about the Earhart project, her mother told Cass (to her amazement) that the famous aviator had once worked in a settlement house two blocks from where her mother grew up. In her math class, Cass is researching the actual details of Earhart's last flight and is working out a formula for calculating the changes in fuel consumption caused by slower air speed in the warm air of the South Pacific. In her history class, her research into the changing conditions of women in the 1920s and 1930s introduced her to Bessie Coleman, one of the first black women aviators. The project also makes Cass curious about the latest flight technology. She's been to Logan Airport to interview air traffic controllers and flight engineers. In English class, she's read biographies of Earhart and other aviators, books that Earhart wrote herself about her record-breaking flights; and she recently discovered poetry written by Earhart in her pre-flying days—some of it written while she lived in Boston.

## A Welcoming Community that Values Teamwork

Though the high school building is old, it creates a sense of welcome. The entrance is bright and friendly, with clearly marked signs, and positive written messages outside the school. Once inside, the school is brightly lit and freshly painted. The custodian—who knows everyone's name—takes great pride in maintaining a clean and orderly building. Staff members smile, introduce themselves, and are helpful and responsive. Student's artwork, paintings and photographs are on the walls. The school has a small but well-staffed library with a good collection of books, periodicals, films, and on-line resources. Every classroom has computers as well as a variety of visual aids to instruction.

The school has been organized into small learning communities, where every student has a consistent and familiar set of relationships that are supportive and informed. The headmaster defines her primary role as the school's educational leader. She spends part of every day in classrooms, coaching and mentoring teachers (even the veterans), and finds many ways to help her staff with the complex task of developing and implementing a multi-disciplinary, thematic curriculum in many ways. For example, she schedules time for teachers to plan together, organizes on-site professional development at the teachers' request, and passes along relevant articles from education journals and reports. The broad diversity of the staff and students is recognized and celebrated in every aspect of the school's work, from the art on the walls to the day-to-day instructional plans in each class.

Teachers all work in teams within the small learning communities. They view their role as coaches first, helping students learn for themselves, rather than as dispensers of knowledge, although they have a deep understanding of their specialty areas. They are committed to developing portfolios and exhibitions as essential elements of assessment for all students. (Cass's research on Amelia Earhart will go into her portfolio which will be a major part of her grade for the term.) Teachers limit their use of text books and prepackaged curriculum materials. They rely instead primarily on "authentic" readings and project-based learning that draws upon the community as an extended classroom and results in student products that are thoughtfully developed and proudly displayed.

Another advantage of these small communities is that teachers and parents have gotten to know eachother better. At an open house, several parents said they were worried that their children wouldn't learn the "basics" with the new project-based curriculum. So a group of parents and teachers organized three evening parent workshops on the new curriculum. They also put together folders which included ideas for parents to support the new curriculum at home, and mailed the folders to every home for the parents and guardians who couldn't attend.

The high school works closely with the nine middle and elementary schools in its cluster. For Cass and her fellow students, this has a subtle but critical impact: in the way that curriculum is sequenced between grades; in the professional networks that now exist among teachers at different levels; and in the greater communication among schools as they share information about students. The schools together keep track of her progress longer, and use measurable data to evaluate the success of programs and strategies.

Cass takes a moment to look into the family care center on the first floor run collaboratively by the community agency and the school. Cass's sister—a lively two-year-old still in diapers—is playing in a small group of children. The center is staffed in part by juniors and seniors from the high school. Cass volunteers there two mornings a week for an hour before her school day begins not only to help meet her community service requirement, but to give her sister more family time in view of her mother's long work hours.

### Planning Together for Life After High School

The shuttle van in the parking lot is filled with students and a teacher heading downtown to their next class—an applied Science class at one of New England's largest teaching hospitals. Cass is not sure of what she wants to do when she graduates, but she knows she wants to continue her studies. Her School-to-Career counselor has been encouraging her to pursue her interest in engineering. Cass knows this means two years at the community college and then two more years in one of the four-year colleges that support the School-to-Career program.

Cass is nervous about the four-year option, even though it's three years away. The standards for admission are high, and her math scores the year before were low. To boost her achievement, her faculty advisor has urged her to sign up for the after-school math tutoring program. But it's hard to find the time. Cass has a paying job, which she loves, in the hospital medical library after her Science classes; she also needs the money. Her worksite counselor is looking into getting her a hospital computer for home use so she can work on math at night.

Cass views the hospital and the staff who work in her class as a part of the school community. Her school day begins in the family care center and ends in the evening after her work in the medical library is finished. In between she has had a full schedule of classes in the school and at the hospital, has worked in two separate academic teams on special projects, and has spent time with her faculty advisor to review her grades. And after supper, she still faces two hours of homework.

### Higher Expectations Create Pressure *and* Improvement

Cass feels a fair amount of pressure: to complete her share of the team's projects, to be on time, to complete her home assignments, and to hold down a paying job where it seems the duties are always changing. School is hard—but it's fun, too. She remembers her school experiences from just three or four years ago, when all she did was listen and take notes while teachers talked—where the subjects were all separate from one another, and every 45 minutes everyone got up and went to a different room. But now, she's learned the importance of asking questions and finding solutions to problems instead of just reciting facts, and is beginning to understand how to acquire new knowledge in different places and apply it to her learning.

As a result, her basic skills in reading, math, writing, and other subjects have been steadily improving. Her school's use of project-based learning has meant that Cass is spending more time reading, writing, and making associations between her subjects, while her motivation to study has increased. Her test score percentages have improved. She is also better prepared to take the SATs that will be a factor in her college admission. Because of her school's innovative schedule and her School-to-Career classes, Cass spends more actual time each day in classes than ever before.

It seems that everyone in the school community is working together now. The projects and themes connect to one another. Cass understands (most of the time) what they are working on and why. She also recognizes her *own* responsibilities to develop intellectual habits of mind and to challenge herself to leadership skills wherever she can among her peers. She knows that she's doing better here than she's done in a very long time. Her school is nurturing, supportive, and highly charged with the excitement of learning. For Cass, every day is a challenge, and an adventure. ❧

# Focus on Children

**A Comprehensive Reform Plan for the Boston Public Schools**

## I Guiding Principles

The vision of the Boston Public Schools is to enable all students to learn at high levels. The following guiding principles should pervade all aspects of our work:

- Set clear expectations for what all students are to know and be able to do in elementary, middle, and high school;
- Provide excellent and equitable opportunities for all children to meet these expectations;
- Enhance the capacity of all employees to support the improvement of teaching and learning;
- Collaborate with families, business, universities, community-based organizations, arts and cultural groups, and government to offer services that strengthen and support children's learning;
- Hold all employees and all collaborators accountable for student success;
- Putting the needs of children first, recognizing that they deserve an education of the highest quality, where their learning styles are appreciated and their diversity is valued;
- Recognize families as instructional partners, encourage their involvement in the teaching and learning process as much as possible, and respect their time and their contributions;
- Build a strong customer service orientation among all staff and a process throughout the Boston Public Schools that encourages direct two-way communication;
- Maintain a vigilant policy of fiscal accountability at all levels of the School Department to assure responsible management and equitable use of all resources; and
- Help students to appreciate and value as well as recognize their responsibility for learning and to understand that the challenges of the next century will require greater effort than ever imagined.

Boston schools and all administrative services will operate in accordance with these principles.

# II Background:
# Creating a Climate for Learning throughout the City

***In America's cities,*** schools and school systems need to radically change their relationship to the surrounding community. Schools cannot afford to operate in isolation from one another or from the neighborhoods, organizations, citizens and citizens' groups that look to them for access, services, and results. Schools must mobilize leadership throughout the city, and must work collaboratively to transform themselves into cohesive communities that assure a safe, motivating, and fully engaging learning climate for all students at all stages of their educational experience.

The public schools of the post-World War II era prepared students to enter a market full of well paid, unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in the manufacturing sector. But today, in a service and technology-based economy, unskilled workers have few opportunities beyond very *low-paying* employment in areas such as retail sales, data entry and food service. Our young people will not be able to prosper in the 21st century workplace without a level of mastery that only a few achieved in the past.

Fortunately, much valuable work has been done in the last decade since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. We now know how to restructure schools; we have learned that restructuring efforts must focus on teaching and learning at the school level so all children can make measurable academic progress. We know also that schools must work collaboratively with their surrounding communities to engage broad public support in the process of restructuring.

In Boston, we have some of the best schools and classrooms in the nation, yet most are still organized on what in industry would be called the old "factory model." We have some of the best performing young people in the state, and not only in the examination schools; but the vast majority of our graduates are not now able to perform at an adequate level of mastery to meet either state requirements or our own higher standards.

We are confident that we can close this gap; but the transition will be difficult and will take a coordinated effort among all of our community leaders and services if we are to succeed.

## A Community Ready for Change

For the first time in decades, the Boston Public Schools is positioned to undertake major improvements in all of its schools. The essential elements for reform are now in place:

- A Mayor committed to school improvement as the top priority of his administration and prepared to direct all available resources to support the public schools.
- An appointed School Committee committed to education reform and to providing stable, thoughtful leadership on education policy.
- A superintendent with extensive experience in managing school district reform and with a mandate for making changes in Boston.
- A strong collaborative partner in the Boston Teachers Union, and a landmark contract including provisions for broad school-based management/shared decision-making, pilot schools and an intervention process to support and restructure failing schools.
- A revitalized Boston Compact that establishes strong, focused partnerships with the city's economic, political, educational, cultural, social service and community leaders.

## A Durable Structure for Collaboration

The Boston Public Schools, like other major urban school districts, have their own models of excellence, where innovations in teaching and learning have shown impressive results. Unlike any other city in the nation, Boston has a durable structure of collaboration and partnership that has engaged leading corporations, higher education institutions, the teachers' union, cultural institutions, human service agencies, community organizations, and parent groups in an organized process of planning around school reform. With the Boston Compact, we have in place the necessary community coalition to support reform in *every one* of our schools.

Research shows, however, that schools rarely change from external pressures or demands alone; but they *can* change through thoughtful internal planning that mobilizes all stakeholders around shared goals and clear priorities.

To this end, Mayor Thomas Menino and the appointed Boston School Committee worked closely with the Boston Teachers Union to develop what is now celebrated as a landmark collective bargaining agreement, ratified in 1993. This contract provides the school district with a powerful set of tools to help the change process. School-based management/shared decision-making is now being implemented in all schools, and School Site Councils are learning to use the authority which the contract gives them to make key school decisions. Five pilot schools opened in 1995, with two more planned for 1996, and the Arts Academy scheduled to open in 1997. This makes Boston the only school district in the nation to establish and expand a network of in-district charter schools in partnership with the teachers' union.

This unique set of elements creates a political, educational, and social climate in which the Boston Public Schools can now engage in a thorough process of re-thinking the way schools operate. This climate enables all of us to focus more energy on children and their instructional experience in the classroom. This Comprehensive Reform Plan connects the many different pieces of school reform to make the whole greater than its parts: high standards for student achievement, improvements in instructional practices, new forms of assessment, a plan for effective professional development, a strategy for engaging parents, powerful school-based governance, accountability, fiscal responsibility, and public engagement.

### A Strategy Focused on Teaching and Learning

The Comprehensive Reform Plan establishes one overarching goal and three ancillary goals that support it. Our mission, our focus, and our collective energies should now be concentrated on improving teaching and learning in our classrooms. Everything we do, from reorganizing our administrative structures to strengthening our community, business and parent partnerships, is directed to achieve that goal.

Some of our strategies to improve teaching and learning are the responsibility of the central office. Others are school-based. Centrally, we will build a more unified K-12 system by establishing citywide standards, curricula, and assessments, and reorganizing our schools into ten clusters aimed at supporting stronger professional relationships and seamless pathways between grades and school levels. Each school will work on building smaller learning communities designed to support more personalized relationships among staff, students, parents, families, and the community. Professional development for all staff will be an important part of this strategy.

The Comprehensive Reform Plan, for the system as well as for each school, applies to all students: regular, bilingual, and special needs. All students as much as possible should be integrated, not separated from each other. Our planning must embrace all student populations and result in a clear strategy to meet every student's educational needs.

We cannot address all the challenges of our complex society within the limits of the school day. We must resolve instead to *do a few things well*, measure them carefully, and hold ourselves fully accountable for the results. We will have succeeded when our graduates leave every school with the skills, knowledge, and habits of mind and work to make choices: to continue their education, to compete in the job market, to serve their communities, and to be lifelong learners.

## III Mission, Goals, and the Plan to Achieve Them

The goals for the Boston Public Schools focus on schools and the communities of people who make them work in service to children. Achieving true reform will require effective implementation of the Reorganization Plan for the Boston Public Schools. The entire School Department—central administration as well as every school—must engage in a process of comprehensive planning, so that all members of our school community are working together effectively in support of our common mission. The Reorganization Plan closely conforms to these goals, so that staff, parents, teachers and students will be able to clearly understand where to find the help they need to improve teaching and learning.

The Comprehensive Reform Plan establishes one primary goal for all of our collective work, and three ancillary goals to support it. The primary goal is to improve teaching and learning in all of our schools. All of our efforts—from reorganizing central offices to the help we seek from businesses, higher education institutions, and the community—are aimed at achieving this goal.

**PRIMARY GOAL** *Improve teaching and learning to enable all students to achieve high standards of performance*

- **GOAL 2** *Change the structure of the Boston Public Schools to focus on student performance and to serve the community.*
- **GOAL 3** *Provide safe, nurturing, healthy schools where students receive the support they need to succeed in school.*
- **GOAL 4** *Engage families and the community in school improvement through a unified collaborative structure and effective communication.*

## *The Mission of the Boston Public Schools*

*We welcome the children of this city into the Boston Public Schools, where effective teaching and learning prepare all of our students to achieve at high levels, and where the entire community works together to focus on children.*

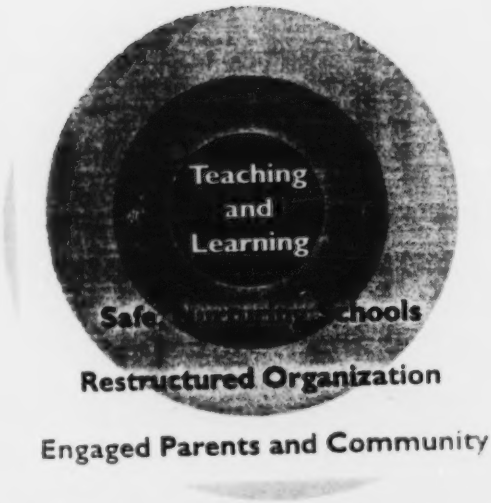
The relationship between the primary and supporting goals might be pictured as a circle. The improvement of teaching and learning is its center, while restructuring, student support, and public engagement surround it. This circle has a second, larger one around it. This larger circle includes our collaborative partners and the overall goals of the community established through the Boston Compact. The Compact has made improved teaching and learning its center as well, providing long-term education and career support involving all partners. In this new, complementary configuration, all the combined resources of the community are aimed directly at the instructional experience.

In our first year we have taken a number of steps toward achieving the overall goal of improved teaching and learning:

- **New standards and curriculum frameworks** in key subjects have been developed.
- **Interim assessments** have been developed that replace outmoded tests and move the system in a new direction toward performance-centered measures.
- **School report cards** have been developed to provide a succinct and readable picture of each school's performance and unique features, and have been made available to schools, school site councils, and parents to help in making school choices.
- **Reorganization** of the Boston School Department is being implemented, including restructuring the central office into service teams designed to support schools, and the elimination of all administrative layers between schools and the superintendent, producing a staff reduction of more than forty positions and savings of more than $2 million. New leadership positions are now being filled.

- **Ten new clusters of schools** have been formed to encourage professional team-building among schools and to build a seamless K-12 system. Ten principals/ headmasters have been appointed as cluster leaders to serve as peer mentors and leaders of whole-school change efforts in their clusters.

- **Principals and headmasters are established as educational leaders** in the system. The ten cluster leaders now make up approximately half of the Superintendent's Leadership Team.




- **The leadership of our schools and school system will continue to be closely examined and held accountable for results.** The superintendent, principals, headmasters, teachers, central office personnel, and other school staff will be evaluated. Standards for performance are being developed; and we are providing staff development and building support networks within and between clusters and the central office.

- **Resources have been reallocated** among schools in the interest of equity across the system, eliminating an informal approach resulting in "winners" and "losers."

- **A unified funding strategy** has been developed which will pool the resources we receive from the business community and allocates them in more focused ways to support our goals, replacing a piecemeal approach that did not result in measurably improved student achievement.

The next steps include the development by each school of a Comprehensive Reform Plan of its own focused on achieving high standards of performance. These plans will engage all constituencies of each school community in their preparation. Each plan will be designed to achieve the overall goals of the system in ways that strategically use all available resources while building on the unique nature of each school.

**OUR PRIMARY GOAL:**
**Improve teaching and learning to enable all students to achieve high standards of performance.**

The first goal is the centerpiece of all of our educational reform. The strategies supporting this goal are at the heart of this reform plan.

We must begin with a shared vision of what good schools should look like. All schools should have:

- High expectations for all students.
- The ability to make informed decisions about how to teach children and to show readily available evidence of student improvement.
- More active than passive learning, where students are encouraged to work independently and cooperatively.

- Autonomy in decision-making and a commitment by everyone in them to be held accountable.
- A deeply held belief that the diversity of our students and community is one of our greatest assets.
- Recognition that important learning takes place at home as well as at school, and that parents and other significant adults are essential partners in children's education.
- Frequent, positive, respectful two-way communication between home and school, and active encouragement of parent involvement in school decision-making.
- Resources focused on instruction.
- Instructional practices that are shared among teaching colleagues, that engage students, and that result in continuous improvement.
- All staff engaged in professional development aimed at better teaching.
- A caring adult in every student's life.
- School leaders, staff and administrators prepared and committed to use data to make informed decisions.
- Frequent, low-stakes, teacher-created assessment to help teachers evaluate the success of their lessons and identify individual learning difficulties in time for successful early intervention.
- Common planning time built into the school day through innovations such as block scheduling, team teaching, and more creative use of staff assignments.
- Open dialogue among all constituents within the school and with the school's community.
- Small learning communities and teams of teachers that spend more than one year with a group of students.
- Adequate, up-to-date technology for instructional use and the professional development to make best use of it.

These elements can be developed in *every* Boston public school. Indeed, many of our schools already have some of them in place. Schools do not need to add more new programs. We must rethink the ways in which staff work together around the common mission of improved teaching and learning. We must change curricula, schedules, and methods of teaching. We must emphasize a team approach to instruction. We must be data-driven and results-oriented in our decisions. We must fully involve community partners in school-based decision-making. This is the process we are calling *whole-school change*. Along with high standards, new curricula and assessments, and professional development, it is the central strategy for school improvement.

There are five essential elements of the strategy to achieve our primary goal.

## 1. Establish high standards and curricula, with assessments aligned to them to improve teaching and learning in the classroom.

Citywide Learning Standards will be established in each subject area with appropriate benchmarks at specific grades. Over the next five years, curricula in all subjects, K-12, that are relevant and teacher-driven will be implemented in all schools. Assessments will include identifying short-term instruments and performance indicators that more accurately measure student achievement and improvement, as well as developing long-term performance-based assessments.

## Citywide Learning Standards

The Citywide Learning Standards describe what every student in the Boston Public Schools will know and be able to do as a condition of promotion, course completion, and graduation. The time line for development calls for English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science to be completed during the 1995-1996 academic year. These are on target. The second group includes Social Studies, World Language Arts, including English as a Second Language, Health, Physical Education, and the Arts, to be developed in 1996-1997.

**Primary Goal**

Improve teaching and learning to enable all students to achieve high standards of performance.

Our standards align with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks and with nationally recognized standards. We have identified standards that are appropriate for the different grade levels and that outline expectations comparable to those in high performing districts throughout the Commonwealth.

In addition to describing expectations for the content areas, the state frameworks and our learning standards require students to develop certain "habits of mind and work" crucial to success in school, in the workplace, and in all life experience. They include:

- Identifying, organizing, planning, and allocating resources;
- Working with others;
- Acquiring and using information;
- Understanding complex interrelationships; and
- Working with a variety of technologies.

We have used the College Board's "Academic Preparation for College: What Students Need to Know and Be Able to Do" as a point of departure in considering the expectations of colleges and universities around the country. We have conducted focus groups, including parents, students, teachers, university faculty, and other members of the community, to consider and respond to our draft standards.

We have also considered the materials that are, or will be, available to teachers throughout the grade levels. Though standards should not be developed with a particular set of materials in mind, close attention has been paid to the exemplary materials that have been and are being developed, particularly in mathematics and science, as we developed our grade-level content standards.

The standards have been developed for *all* students. There are not separate standards for regular education students, bilingual students, and students with special needs. All students will be expected to master the same content, at or above prescribed levels of proficiency. Students with limited English proficiency or with special educational needs will be able to *demonstrate* these understandings in ways that are different from those employed by regular education students.

The standards in our draft documents should be treated as expectations students will increasingly meet over the next five years. Though some of next year's students may not

perform up to the standards, we should expect that students five years from now will. Between now and then, our School Site Councils should include in their Comprehensive School Reform Plans the appropriate strategies to prepare everyone to meet these standards within a reasonable period of time. In addition, resources at the central level will be mobilized to support schools in their efforts in the areas of professional development, student support services, and materials acquisition, to name a few.

We are planning acceleration strategies for students who fall behind in meeting these standards, including: tutoring, after-school programs, and summer school. We also will work with community organizations already providing services to be sure they understand our standards and can align their work with our curriculum. Through creative scheduling, school staff will find more time within the school day to plan with colleagues and to spend with students who need extra help. While creative scheduling alone will not provide all possible supports, it is *an essential starting point for every school in order to make best use of every available resource.*

In the meantime, we expect student performance to move closer to the standards each year. Schools will annually identify one or two of the products included in the "Student Requirements" sections of each subject area, and focus particular attention on these products during that school year. We will also develop task descriptions for these products that teachers across the city will use to assess students' performance on these products.

At the close of each of these years, we expect to gather samples of students' work to assess progress, to identify exemplars of student work at various levels of performance, and to refine our task descriptions. Teachers will also gather together to examine students' work and to share instructional strategies and materials. Eventually, students will be expected to successfully complete all of these products as a condition of course completion, promotion, and graduation.

Over the next two years a new promotion policy will be developed, and report cards will be updated where necessary. The performance evaluation process will be revised, our student support plan will be updated, and the Code of Discipline will be reconsidered, in light of increasing expectations for students and staff alike. In short, we will revise appropriate policies and target resources to ensure our students are focused on learning and have sufficient support to perform up to the new standards.

### Interim Assessment

During the past year there has been ongoing discussion about academic assessment, both short- and long-term, within the Boston Public Schools and by the Boston Compact Measurement Committee. In February, 1996, following the report of an Interim Assessment Task Force, the Boston School Committee approved new assessments. These interim assessments will move the schools more in the direction of a performance-based approach to assessment while also making use during the interim of a standardized test. Over time the Boston Public Schools assessment system will incorporate multiple measures of academic assessment with an increased emphasis on using performance assessments.

Our interim plan includes norm-referenced testing at grades 3 through 11 except for those three grades that will be involved with the State assessments (grades 4, 8, and 10). This will provide local norm-referenced

assessment information at two grades per level. The Stanford 9th Edition achievement tests in reading and mathematics have been adopted as our nationally standardized norm-referenced test to be used for the next several years as we develop our testing strategy more fully. This replaces the Metropolitan Achievement Test, which had been in use in Boston for many years.

**Primary Goal**

Improve teaching and learning to enable all students to achieve high standards of performance.

In conjunction with norm-referenced testing, we will make available to schools performance assessments linked to the new curriculum. These assessments will be standards driven, instruction based, and represent the type of assessment that the system will move towards. These should combine both locally developed and externally available instruments and procedures. Development will begin on writing assessments for every grade, 1-12.

We are also exploring the possibility of incorporating the work of the New Standards Project in our curriculum. The New Standards Project is marketed by Harcourt Brace, as is the Stanford 9.

A Performance Assessment Pilot was undertaken in the spring of 1996. Over the past ten years there has been a growing interest in exploring new ways of assessing student progress. Performance assessments have been given to classes in grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. Altogether there have been 1,609 students tested in 21 schools—2 high schools, 3 middle schools, and 16 elementary schools. Assessments were developed by Harcourt Brace to complement the Stanford 9 multiple choice tests. They included open-ended tasks in reading and mathematics that assessed instructional objectives best measured with performance-based tasks and student constructed responses. Harcourt Brace conducted workshops for staff and provided scoring for the completed assessments. Professional staff from Harcourt Brace then worked with teachers and administrators to interpret the results and to translate the information gained into improved classroom instruction.

## 2. Provide leadership development for all staff as a critical leverage point for school improvement.

School leadership includes principals and headmasters, school site council members, teachers, parents, families, and key staff. Training programs will include both content and pedagogy and focus on changing classroom practices. New curricula and assessments will change expectations for what students must know, *how* they learn, and demonstrate *what* they know. Teachers will be trained in new ways to help students learn independently as well as in groups. Teaching approaches will emphasize teachers as problem posers rather than dispensers of "right" answers. Best practices will be shared and new classroom management approaches will be developed that ensure respect for and responsiveness to the needs of all children.

The Boston Public Schools is committed to providing both school-based and non school-based leaders with the skills needed to improve all of our schools. Leadership skills for parents, families and teachers are also important as they work in the schools to drive school reform. Developing a

Performance assessments include, for example, position papers, letters, and research papers; debates, biographical projects, student-conducted research surveys; science lab reports, traditional science projects, and oral presentations. In mathematics, examples include writing word problems and solutions starting from numerical representations.

new generation of leaders is critical to planning, implementing, and sustaining comprehensive school reform in Boston.

## The Center for Leadership Development

The Center for Leadership Development (CLD) was created as part of the 1994 Boston Public Schools/ Boston Teachers Union contract to improve student success by creating a culture that professionalizes adult learning and recognizes the relationship between powerful learning experiences and changes in practices. The CLD provides opportunities for administrators, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, families, and central administrators to explore their practice, challenge their assumptions about teaching and learning, expand their content knowledge, and create self-sustaining networks among colleagues within schools and across the district.

Effective school reform depends upon both the willingness and ability of individual employees to change, and the organization's capacity for continuous improvement. The CLD addresses this through a combination of professional development offerings, including consultations to individual clusters and schools to determine professional development needs and responsive strategies, and the development of a clearinghouse of professional development resources available within the district and throughout the community.

The CLD's professional development offerings are crafted to support the system's priorities, respond to the local needs of schools, and encourage teachers in their personal pursuit of knowledge and classroom strategies. The CLD offers a range of services, including: districtwide professional development days; principal/headmaster leadership development; ongoing institutes for teachers focusing on issues of content knowledge, pedagogy, and assessment; study group grants for teachers; and development for support staff and central district departments. A primary focus of the CLD over the next five years will be

### Effective Teaching and Learning

Good schools are places where teachers are able to work together. Leadership development will be provided to re-emphasize what many of our schools and staff already practice. Good teachers are intellectually curious and are themselves readers and writers who encourage high performance from their students in all subject areas and communicate their ideas effectively.

**Effective teachers:**

- Hold high expectations for students, understanding that they can learn at high levels: no "my students can't..." conversations.
- Are good facilitators of learning, concerned with helping students learn how to learn, understanding that all avenues of inquiry are open to them.
- See themselves as "coaches" in the learning process, helping students to find the answers themselves.
- Use students effectively, in cooperative groups and as teachers of other students, building on students' strengths.
- Foster active learning and hands-on activities, recognizing that students have many different learning styles, and that the traditional "chalk and talk" approaches do not work for many children.
- Make active use of community resources, emphasizing the need for these resources to be aimed at improving instructional practices.
- See themselves as important role models—learners, readers, and writers, inquisitive, respectful of others, and open to new ideas.
- Are nurturing, honest with students, helping them to gain a sense of empowerment.
- Respond carefully and promptly to student work.
- Develop critical themes as guides to instruction.
- Are working to be accountable for improved student achievement based on each student making progress each year.

professional development that supports the implementation of the citywide learning standards.

The CLD's other major function is one of consulting to schools, clusters, and departments to assist in the identification of professional development needs and the development of programs that respond to these needs. The CLD staff's experience in diagnosis and program development will be an important resource to schools as they work to develop their comprehensive school plans and identify corresponding priority areas for professional development.

**Primary Goal**

Improve teaching and learning to enable all students to achieve high standards of performance.

As the convener and coordinator of outside organizations interested in providing professional development, the CLD will strive to maximize community resources and ensure that professional development is available to BPS staff and families in priority areas identified by the district, schools, departments, and individuals. The CLD will serve as an important coordinating link between the community, higher education, local and national foundations, agencies, and the school system around capacity-building professional development.

### Career in Teaching Program

The Career in Teaching Program, a key educational reform of the 1994 Boston Teachers Union contract, focuses on improving the profession of teaching in Boston through increased opportunities for professional growth, involvement in decision making, increased responsibilities and accountability, and higher salaries for classroom teachers. The development of a professional teacher career ladder is the program's main avenue to provide these incentives to attract and to retain highly accomplished teachers in the profession. Lead Teacher, the fourth and top level of the ladder, is new and without precedent in the Boston Public Schools. Lead Teachers are eligible for increased leadership opportunities, such as mentoring beginning teachers, developing curriculum, and assisting with reform initiatives. The Career in Teaching Program also supports Boston teachers who choose to pursue certification by the National Board for Professional Standards. A related component of the career ladder looks to the future. *TeachBoston*, a School-to-Career undertaking *(see page 25)*, recruits and prepares BPS students to pursue teaching careers.

## 3. Plan and carry out whole-school change that leads to high student achievement and clear accountability.

Achieving higher standards will demand more focus and support from the entire community. To this end, every school will be expected to develop a Comprehensive Reform Plan that will enable schools to change their organizations from being a place for a variety of projects and programs that have limited connections to one another, and to develop a unified, focused, data-driven approach to school improvement. This plan will serve as a single planning document for Title One, Chapter 636, and all other planning requirements that in the past have required separate planning processes and documents.

Schools will become more personalized environments where children can learn and grow safely, and where relationships among adults and between staff and their students are based upon personal contact, thoughtful discussion and planning, and engagement of community partners.

Many of our schools include a proliferation of separately managed and funded projects. Sometimes these projects help to improve the school climate, and many of them provide needed services to students and staff. The dilemma is that they tend to be seen as added onto the organic structure of the school rather than a part of it. The time and resources that are expended managing separate, individual projects might be put to better use, drawing the energy and assistance from partners more directly into the core operation of the schools. Projects originate from partnerships, new public funding initiatives, and funding sources such as Title One and Chapter 636. These resources are desperately needed; they need to be built into the fabric of the whole school as a part of a total service approach for all students.

A good example of the shift to whole school planning is in the use of Title I funding. For many years, Title I served a subset of students in pull-out programs. We now have the flexibility in Title I schools to integrate these funds to support the *whole* school. A similar redirection should be applied to other resources as well, with the focus on academic achievement.

Schools will be evaluated based on measurable performance. Professional networks within and across clusters will be encouraged to support schools and school leaders. High schools will be strongly encouraged to explore restructuring options that include smaller learning communities.

There are a number of important elements that should be considered as essential as schools develop their plans for whole-school change.

## Process for Whole-School Change

The Comprehensive Reform Plans of each school should be viewed as living documents, reflective of the continuous process of planning and self-scrutiny that each school must undertake to truly change the "whole school."

The process for developing these plans should include:

1. **School performance and practice.** Specifically, school staff will:
   - analyze student performance data for a clearer understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school;
   - adopt alternative measures of students' performance, such as portfolios or teacher-designed classroom assessments, which provide useful information on student achievement;
   - conduct a thorough examination of existing resources and look at key components of the school—such as what instructional methods are used, how student and teacher time is organized, how students are grouped, how the school is staffed, what courses are taught—to identify issues critical to student success;
   - develop ways to reorganize resources (including staff positions) to address these issues and to better meet the needs of students;

- address integration issues including special education and bilingual education inclusion into regular education;
- review other models for organizing and scheduling the school day, including block scheduling, flexible scheduling, and team teaching;
- review models for restructuring large schools into smaller learning communities.

2. **Student performance.** Specifically, school staff will:
   - focus on improving students' capacity to master the new Citywide Learning Standards;
   - focus on a curricular goal (such as all students reading on grade level by the third grade) or on an instructional practice (such as integrated thematic instruction) that would serve as a way to reorganize the school to increase student performance;
   - explore models that would serve as a way to reorganize the school around the curricular goal or practice that leads to increased student performance;
   - promote the wellness of students to ensure their capacity to learn by identifying barriers to individual children's learning;
   - strengthen relationships with parents, families and the community to support student learning and to ensure their participation in all planning and implementation efforts.

**Primary Goal**

Improve teaching and learning to enable all students to achieve high standards of performance.

3. **Staff renewal and professional development.** Specifically, school staff will:
   - devise a comprehensive staff development strategy in place of piecemeal efforts—a sustained, high quality approach that reinforces among all staff a commitment to addressing the priorities of the school over time;
   - commit professional development days to staff training and participate in other opportunities designed to meet school goals, such as teacher study groups, visits to schools where there are examples of best practice, and networks of teachers working to improve instructional practice;
   - increase common planning time during the school day or offer time after school so that teachers and others can meet;
   - promote the wellness of staff to ensure their capacity to teach effectively;
   - examine current teaching practices, explore new instructional methods, and consider adopting academic models that are closely aligned with current research on teaching and learning.

Madison Park Technical Vocational High School is a prime example of successful whole school change. In 1992, when it became obvious that organizational chaos was placing the school's existence in jeopardy, a planning team consisting of teachers, administrators, parents, students and community representatives gathered to create a blueprint for revitalization. A variety of initiatives was designed to integrate vocational and academic learning, to provide students with an understanding of industry, and to link vocational programs with community economic development. This resulted in the restructuring of Madison Park into four academies or "schools within schools"—for health, technical, and commercial training. Student-managed portfolios, creative scheduling, common planning time, creation of solid higher education and business partnerships, and innovative use of community volunteers are among some of the initiatives that lead to the school's recent rebirth. In May of 1996, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges board voted unanimously to extend Madison Park's accreditation.

4. **Evaluation.** Specifically, school staff will:
   - set rigorous benchmarks for improving student achievement, as required by the Boston Public Schools;
   - understand that the school's eligibility for external funding may be linked to reaching those benchmarks.

The Boston Plan for Excellence in the Public Schools is leading the way in the whole-school change process through its 21st Century School Grants. These competitive grants were awarded to 27 schools for school planning and evaluation. These schools will share their successes with all schools.

## School-Based Management/Shared Decision-Making

School-based management/shared decision-making is at the very core of the reform process for the Boston Public Schools. This is the process by which parents, families, teachers, and principals/headmasters work together to improve teaching and learning for all students. SBM/SDM is the cornerstone of the collective bargaining agreement between the Boston School Committee and the Boston Teachers Union as well as the Boston Compact.

School Site Councils should be actively engaged in shaping the Comprehensive Reform Plan, and in the ongoing management and decision-making process in each school. School Site Councils are the top priority for our leadership development efforts. The Center for Leadership Development will coordinate this training while providing a brokering role between external resources and the schools. Technical assistance will also be provided through the Comprehensive School Planning Team. School Site Councils will provide an important source of continuity as the whole-school change process unfolds.

## School-to-Career

School-to-Career is an essential educational design for the curriculum and organization for all schools. It is not a separate program. It will be incorporated into the educational strategy of all elementary, middle and high schools planning for whole-school change.

There are three elements of School-to-Career:

1. Career aspiration encouraged at all levels, with college and career centers in all high schools.
2. Extension of the classroom to the workplace and the community.
3. Project-based learning, in which students create academic products through their engagement in a variety of learning settings.

Through the School-to-Career system, the classroom extends to the workplace and the larger community. This way, students develop multiple pathways to arrive at solutions to complex problems. They receive the opportunity to explore potential careers. They develop and improve their communication and literacy skills. They learn about the community in which they live and how to best utilize its resources. Students and teachers learn together about industry needs and the skills students will require for future success. Community Service Learning is an extension of School-to-Career that encourages all students to engage in project-based learning with a special focus on work that supports the community.

Vocational education, work-study, and School-to-Career programs must be premised on the assumption that all students will be held to the same high academic standards. These programs can provide a whole-school change model within which schools can restructure themselves to meet the new higher academic standards. School-based and work-based learning are a powerful combination that engages students by making strong, clear connections between theory and practice, between abstract concepts and their concrete applications.

**Primary Goal**

Improve teaching and learning to enable all students to achieve high standards of performance.

School-to-Career also offers students an opportunity to develop pathways for themselves into careers and higher education—not only for those who are learning at the workplace now, but for those coming up through the school system as well. Employment opportunities that extend the classroom are a powerful motivator for students. They also provide teachers with opportunities for experiences outside the classroom that can help to change the culture of a school from more traditional models of stand-and-deliver instruction, which succeed only for children whose learning style "fits" that teaching style, to one where *all* students can be challenged, where teams of students and teachers can participate as learners together, and where teachers are no longer isolated in their classrooms but can work cooperatively with each other in a multidisciplinary approach.

ProTech is a multiyear School-to-Career program that combines school and work-based classroom learning experience with paid work experience to prepare students for occupations in six industries: health care, financial services, utilities/communications, environmental services, business services, and restaurant/hospitality. More than 450 ProTech students in seven Boston high schools spend their junior and senior years of high school and at least two years in college learning and developing basic, technical and work-readiness skills in one of many targeted occupations. ProTech business partners include such diverse organizations as Bank of Boston, Massachusetts General Hospital, McKinsey and Company, Cablevision of Boston, Boston Water & Sewer Commission and Master Printers of New England. These organizations provide skills, support, and the critical sense of continuity for students who might not otherwise have aspired to post-secondary education.

Boston is in the uniquely favorable position of having its employer community organized to support School-to-Career on a broad scale. Boston employers see their role as a *shared responsibility* between schools and the workplace for what happens educationally for students both in the classroom and in the business setting. Boston currently has 1,400 students involved in School-to-Career. Middle schools as well as high schools are now working closely with the Boston Private Industry Council to involve more students, teachers, and classrooms in School-to-Career.

### Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning is a teaching strategy that encourages students to learn by developing projects that result in actual products. Science projects are the best known examples of this strategy. Project-based learning can be used in virtually every academic discipline. Project-

based learning often involves groups of students working together on a single project. Students learn cooperation and collaborative skills—what it means to be a member of a team. The projects they develop go far beyond a paper and pencil test. Students receive hands-on experiences producing projects related to subjects in "real" and active ways. *Active learning* through project-based learning, rather than passive learning with students simply listening to lectures by teachers or reading and memorizing facts from textbooks, facilitates the development of a number of skills while it also assures long-term acquisition of facts, ideas, and philosophies.

Project-based learning is a powerful way to change how teachers teach, providing them with methods for teaching all students together regardless of ability levels. Students learn in different ways; they learn to solve problems in groups and independently; and decrease their reliance on hearing the "answers" only from a text book or teacher. Project-based learning facilitates longer term and deeper learning by students.

The School-to-Career strategy of the Boston Public Schools depends on project-based learning as well as performance assessment. The high performance classroom of the future as well as the high performance workplace will depend on the ability of the individual student to demonstrate the effective use of both knowledge and skill, and the ability to produce valuable work products.

At Fenway Middle College High School, project-based learning is deeply embedded in the curriculum. Classes in all subject areas focus on essential or "generative" questions that stimulate higher order thinking. For example, in a humanities class, students might be asked to respond to the question, "What is a just society?" This might generate such projects as building a three-dimensional monument, making a dramatic presentation, staging a debate, or reading and critiquing a piece of literature. In a science class at Fenway, a working scientist might grapple aloud with a real-world scientific question. Students might then generate their own questions, such as, "What are the causes and effects of anorexia?" "How does a kite work?" "How does the structure of one disease differ from another?" In a math class, students might be asked to conduct a survey using statistics, probability and other mathematical functions. In 1996 Fenway Middle College High School was recognized by the U.S. Department of Education as one of ten innovative high schools in the country.

## Inclusion

We will expect every school to value and use "inclusion" as an important strategy for changing teaching practices in every classroom. Inclusion means providing the services every student needs, and to which they are entitled by law, in the regular classroom to the fullest extent possible. We believe inclusion benefits all children, not just those receiving special education, bilingual, and Title I services. For example, bilingual inclusion will support a goal of our learning standards: that *every* child be fluent in two languages, as is the case in many nations throughout the world.

## Pilot Schools

The Boston Teachers Union and the Boston School Committee are the first labor and management team in the country to launch "pilot schools" to explore models of educational excellence which will help foster widespread educational reform throughout all of the Boston Public Schools.

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Pilot schools were created in the landmark 1993 BTU/BPS contract as a means through which best practices could be explored in schools that were conceptualized as wholly new learning communities, and that these best practices could be replicated in other schools throughout the system. Pilot schools are free of many collective bargaining and school department rules.

Five new pilot schools opened in the fall of 1995. Two more are scheduled to open in the fall of 1996, and the Boston Arts Academy, approved in 1995, is scheduled to open in 1997. A third round of applications will be encouraged for this fall for existing schools to apply for pilot school status, which would become operational in the fall of 1997.

**Primary Goal**

Improve teaching and learning to enable all students to achieve high standards of performance.

In planning the process of whole-school change, Boston schools have the opportunity to apply for pilot school status. This can be a powerful option for schools that are interested in having greater latitude in planning and school management.

Fourth and fifth grade students in 15 Boston elementary schools participated in National Geographic Kids Network, a telecommunications-based science curriculum. The project, funded by a grant from the NYNEX Foundation, uses computers and telephone lines to link research teams in the United States and around the world. Students experience the scientific process firsthand and compare data on topics such as acid rain, trash disposal, and solar energy. They share this information with children as far away as Australia and New Zealand. The project's resounding success is due largely to a strong professional development component for teachers. This technology initiative aligns with Mayor Menino's goal of providing one computer for every four students in five years' time.

### 4. Support a broad-based literacy effort so that all students are ready for school.

The City of Boston has committed itself to the goal of all students being able to read by third grade through *Read Boston*, a broad-based campaign to promote literacy and to help families support the instructional experiences of their children. Read Boston is a resource to our Early Learning Centers and elementary schools.

An essential feature of the city's aggressive commitment to literacy is the move to full-day kindergarten for all five-year-olds. This represents a major focus for early childhood efforts in the Boston Public Schools. While it has required a shift in resources away from direct provision of half-day Kindergarten 1 and 2, the Boston Public Schools will work closely with community groups to expand existing educational opportunities for four-year-olds. This change will allow the system to commit to a more focused, concentrated, full-day kindergarten program for all of its students.

### 5. Increase the use of technology for effective teaching and learning.

Technology is a powerful tool that can transform the learning experiences in classrooms and improve the ways in which teachers serve children. Mayor Thomas Menino has set an

ambitious goal of one computer for every four students in five years. The Mayor has also called for a computer for every teacher and a technology infrastructure linking every classroom to the world. Activity is well underway in programs such as Net Day Boston 97, which will be a major program to wire classrooms in Boston through donations of materials and volunteer efforts.

To this end, staff from the Boston Public Schools, the Boston Teachers Union, NYNEX, and an extensive list of representatives from business, education, community, parents, families, and city government have developed a broad strategy for expanding the access and use of technology throughout the Boston Public Schools. The LINC (Learning and Information Network for the Community) Boston Comprehensive Technology Plan was approved by the School Committee in June 1996. The Technology Plan, the result of an 18-month planning process, provides a strategic blueprint for integrating technology into the school system's overall reform. It also calls for training for teachers and staff, and an effective system of support and maintenance for existing and new technology.

As teachers, administrators, school staff, and parents attempt to reform and restructure schools, we must provide students with the new skills necessary to compete in an information-based global economy. Students must be empowered through the use of instructional technology to create their own knowledge, think more critically, and communicate and solve problems more creatively and analytically.

The Technology Plan focuses on implementation of the Mayor's goals as well as training and maintenance for the system. It also integrates other important initiatives already underway, including:

- supporting the curriculum planning and management team in the development of citywide learning standards;
- allowing the maximum feasible latitude and support for decision-making at the school level; and
- fitting within the framework of the City of Boston's Strategic Information Systems Plan.

## Supporting Improved Teaching and Learning

The next three goals—restructuring, student safety and support, and public engagement—are intended not as separate initiatives, but as necessary supportive goals to help schools achieve the primary goal of improved teaching and learning.

### GOAL 2: Change the structure of the Boston Public Schools to focus on student performance and to serve the community.

Specific strategies to restructure the Boston Public Schools include:

**1. Fully implement the Reorganization Plan that changes the structure of the organization to a seamless K-12 system focused on improving student performance.**

The Reorganization Plan describes in detail a complete structural redirection of the school department—from a rigidly defined pyramid of command and control to a streamlined, customer-service oriented

organization where the layer of administration between school-based leadership and the Superintendent has been eliminated. In the new organization, all services are clearly connected and accountable to one another, and the focus for every department and employee will be to support teaching and learning in the schools.

**Goal 2**

Change the structure of the Boston Public Schools to focus on student performance and to serve the community.

This reorganization is a radical departure for the Boston Public Schools. Reorganization efforts in the past have used the existing structure as their starting point, sought budgetary economies where possible, and for the most part redeployed staff into essentially the same roles and departments. In marked contrast, this plan starts with a different set of assumptions: that the heart of school system operations is the school site, not the central office; that school-based staff must have a major stake in the decision-making process for the system as a whole as well as their schools; and that all staff exist to support schools in their instructional mission.

The Reorganization Plan provides a detailed view of the new organization of the School Department. The highlights of the plan include three new priorities which are pivotal in the new education direction outlined in this document: the expanded role of principals/headmasters, the cluster organization for schools, and the commitment to customer service.

### Principals/Headmasters as the Educational Leaders of the School System

With the elimination of the four Level Offices, the Superintendent and the city's principals and headmasters become the system's educational leaders, with no administrative layer or bureaucratic procedures separating them. Principals and headmasters will comprise half the members of the Superintendent's Leadership Team, reversing decades of representation through level administrators. This change is designed to eliminate barriers, facilitate communication, and enable principals and headmasters to be the true educational leaders in their schools.

### Clusters of Schools: A Structure for a Seamless Kindergarten through Grade 12 Network

The focal point for reorganization is the ten *clusters* of 10 to 12 elementary, middle, and high schools in geographic proximity. Within this cluster model, principals and headmasters will be able to share ideas, collectively solve problems, coordinate curriculum initiatives from kindergarten through grade 12, and identify obstacles to improving school performance. Each cluster will have a principal or headmaster from one of the schools in its cluster serving as Cluster Leader.

### Customer Service Orientation throughout the Boston Public Schools

The Reorganization Plan specifies the organizational connections as well as responsibilities of each department, eliminating fragmentation and duplication of administrative functions. The plan creates a clear structure of support between central office and the schools. The

driving organizational concept is *teams:* flexible, collegial units with accountability shared from the top down, bottom up, and across units. With this reorganization, a major new focus of all teams, units, and staff will be on customer service, with a special emphasis on responding to parents' and families'' needs.

In keeping with the Guiding Principles for the Boston Public Schools listed on the first page of this plan, the reorganization emphasizes a commitment to *customer service* at all levels of the system, in every building, at every telephone. Improved customer service will be provided for the parents, families and students of the Boston Public Schools, and also will include school-based staff and other fellow employees. Streamlining the central office will enable all personnel to concentrate on school improvement.

## 2. Fully implement the educational reforms of the Boston Teachers Union/BPS contract.

The reforms established through collective bargaining between the Boston Teachers Union and the Boston School Committee are not separate initiatives added on to the essential school improvement strategy, but in fact are central to its realization. These reforms include the establishment of School-Based Management/ Shared Decision-Making in every school, the creation of the Center for Leadership Development, the Career in Teaching Program, and the Pilot Schools. Each of these reforms is described in their appropriate context in this document under the Primary Goal section of this Plan. School Improvement Awards, which are also a creation of collective bargaining, are described in the next section.

The Boston Teachers Union has been an essential partner in the development of a reform strategy for Boston. As this document illustrates, the provisions of the collective bargaining agreement will have a sweeping impact on the process of planning for change, especially in leadership and professional development, and in whole-school change. These priorities, developed jointly with the leadership of the Boston Teachers Union over the past eight months, are consistent with those of the Unified Funding Strategy.

While in the past, reform elements of previous collective bargaining agreements have gone unfunded, the present agreement is fully operational and has the support of the Mayor and the Boston School Committee.

## 3. Provide incentives for improvement that are equitable and data-driven.

***School Improvement Awards*** created through the BTU/BPS contract encourage schools to focus on instructional improvement. These awards will be refined and adjusted to respond to new forms of student assessment.

The first School Improvement Awards were given to schools in the fall of 1995 at a ceremony held at the John F. Kennedy Library. Schools were presented with cash awards—as much as $25,000—for demonstrating measurable improvement on a set of indicators for school performance. The indicators included student performance on standard tests, student and faculty attendance, and reduction in dropouts. A total of $500,000 was awarded.

With the change in assessments from the Metropolitan Achievement Test to the Stanford 9, the coming year will be one of transition for the School Improvement Awards as new baseline data are compiled to be used for measuring improvement in successive years. Awards for 1995-96 will be based on similar criteria where possible. In future years, as more data are available on interim assessments, the award criteria will continue to be fine-tuned to give as accurate and fair a picture as possible of schools that have demonstrated the greatest levels of measurable gain.

School Improvement Awards are a unique and compelling way for Boston to underscore its commitment to *improvement*, and to showcase schools that have earned distinction.

**Goal 2**

Change the structure of the Boston Public Schools to focus on student performance and to serve the community.

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**4. Fully implement an all-funds budgeting process that is zero-based, program-based, and school-based.**

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The Budget Request for fiscal year 1997 represents a significant departure from "business as usual" in the Boston Public Schools. It is the result of a comprehensive review of our resources, a critical look at how we deliver services, and a decision-making model that relies on clearly articulated criteria that align with our educational strategies to improve teaching and learning for all students.

This approach moves us beyond an annual consideration of incremental funding for selected program areas. It directly challenges our base line budget and forces specific justifications for spending decisions that are consistent with a comprehensive plan for educational improvement.

### Alignment of Resources with Educational Priorities

The new budget attempts to meet existing funding requirements for collective bargaining and fixed costs while directing resources to be more closely aligned with educational priorities. These include:

- Curriculum Standards and Frameworks
- High School Accreditation
- Textbooks and Instructional Materials
- Special and Bilingual Education
- Broader Access to Student Support Services
- Assessment
- School-to-Career
- Full Day Kindergarten
- Arts in Education Policy
- Technology Plan

In order to succeed, this effort requires a multi-year approach that incorporates an all-funds perspective for both planning and budgeting.

### Zero-Based Budgeting

Movement towards funding a comprehensive educational strategy requires more than adding additional funds at the margin to new program areas. It calls for a rethinking of how we use our existing resources and how we direct those resources to accomplish agreed upon

goals. As a first step in applying the concept of zero-based budgeting we have covered two areas that represent approximately 75% of the total spending: staff allocations and textbooks and materials. The FY97 Budget Request incorporates the results of two major projects on staffing: uniform staff allocations for school-based positions and the reorganization of administration.

### Program-Based Budgets

The new budget process also attempts to move forward in presenting information that is more useful to a wide range of audiences. In addition to knowing *what we buy* with our budget dollars, it is equally important to know *what we do* with our dollars. As a result, we have presented a program based budget that shows the allocation of budget dollars to major programmatic areas: regular education, vocational education, special education, bilingual education, and school support services. This view of the budget allows readers to determine how we match our dollars to programmatic areas.

### All-Funds Budgets

A comprehensive approach to both planning and budgeting requires that total resources available be considered in making judgments about what activities to support and how much should be budgeted. To support our efforts in thinking critically about how services are delivered and resources are managed, we have included in our budget document substantial information regarding external funds.

## GOAL 3: Provide safe, nurturing schools where students receive the support they need to succeed in school.

Parents, teachers and students place a high premium on classrooms and schools that provide safe, healthy, nurturing environments where learning is not intruded upon by disciplinary issues, harassment and discrimination. Often the challenges to safety occur in the neighborhoods around the schools, while the school buildings themselves have become havens of safety away from violence and the pressures of drugs and negative affiliations. The Boston Public Schools and the Boston Police Department have established formal linkages to cooperate on assuring the safety of school children and adults in and around the Boston schools.

Specific strategies to provide safe, nurturing schools include:

### 1. Establish attractive, caring and secure school environments.

In the Boston schools envisioned in this plan, the environment is congenial to children in ways appropriate to their ages. Schools become *learning communities*, where all the elements combine to reinforce the instructional experience. The physical environment matters. It is clean and colorful. Student art and writing adorn the walls. Classrooms are bright. Tables and chairs are in every classroom. All schools are free of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.

While there is a great deal of work to be done on many of our school facilities, we are working over the next five years to achieve a common vision. Every classroom will have an adequate number of computers, linked to a variety of networks beyond the school. There will be a television monitor, a VCR, and a telephone readily accessible to every teacher. Lots of

books and periodicals will be available. The school will have an accessible media center with an ongoing supply of books, videotapes, microcards, and other educational equipment. Working spaces for teachers in or adjacent to the library will be available.

While more resources are needed, schools will make best use of their existing space and materials to create an environment consistent with our mission, *to be welcoming to children.* The School Department has established the Capital Improvement Program to take the lead on implementation of this plan. Its four person staff will work closely with the Public Facilities Department and the Superintendent's Leadership Team.

**Goal 3**

Provide safe, nurturing schools where students receive the support they need to succeed in school.

## 2. Emphasize violence prevention and character education.

Central to the goal of assuring safe, nurturing schools is paying daily attention to violence prevention. The Code of Discipline spells out what is allowed, what is not, and what the consequences are for those who violate it. Violence prevention also includes development of peer mediation and conflict resolution skills for staff as well as students and provides a means for improved classroom management through less confrontational teaching styles.

There are several important examples of outstanding complementary programs providing and promoting character education in the Boston Public Schools, including *Facing History and Ourselves*, the *Max Warburg Courage Curriculum*, and the *Louis Brown Peace Curriculum*. Violence prevention curricula include *Words Not Weapons*, *The Second Step*, and Deborah Prothrow Stith's *Violence Prevention Program*.

Character education strengthens important life values such as honesty, patience, perseverance and courage. We will use the program *Voices of Love and Freedom* to support our third goal. Through a variety of approaches, including literature and new teaching strategies, VLF reinforces and creates opportunities to model these values. It also teaches students that violence is never an acceptable response to a problem.

## 3. Establish integrated services for children and families, with linkages to community, health care, social services, and recreational providers.

Children and adolescents in America face a number of health risks in the 1990s, including HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, teenage violence, suicide, and teenage pregnancy. Unlike health problems of the past, these new problems are often the result of social and behavioral rather than biological causes. Some students also face risks resulting from poverty, homelessness, hunger, unhealthy housing conditions, child abuse and substance abusing adults.

The Boston Public Schools must work with community-based organizations, youth development agencies, and others that serve children, youth and families to address these concerns and to develop a comprehensive school health program for the Boston Public Schools.

The Comprehensive School Health Program combines counseling, psychological and social services, nutrition services, health services, physical and health education, parent and community involvement, health promotion for staff, and healthy school environments into a unified model of service delivery.

Our goal is for every school to have a student service coordinator or a comprehensive health education and support services (CHESS) specialist who is responsible for prevention/early intervention programs and the linkages of services with community agencies. The availability of school nursing has increased. The immunization rate of entering kindergartners is the best it has ever been. School health centers now operate in 13 Boston high schools.

These services are a critical element of the Student Support Services Team created in the Reorganization Plan to bring together the various elements of wellness promotion, student support services, counseling and alternative education into a single team. By making strong connections between school-based services and other health care and support organizations, the Student Services Support Team will be able to successfully implement the goals of the Comprehensive School Health Program in a systemic way.

## 4. Continue to improve the collaborative relationship between the Boston Public Schools and the key public safety organizations.

The Boston Public Schools has worked closely with the Boston Police Department, the District Attorney's Office, the Probation Department, the MBTA Police, and the Departments of Youth Services and Social Services to create the Safe Schools Plan. This plan, and the priorities it has recommended, fit with and will help to meet the goals of the Comprehensive Reform Plan for the Boston Public Schools.

The Safe Schools Plan includes a set of priorities with initial strategies and programs to meet them:

1. *To research and design a systemwide safety plan drawing on best practices.* Strategies include model safety programs, safety awards, establishment of a school safety team, and external funds for safety initiatives.
2. *To create a systematic procedure for compiling safety incidents and a systemwide process for disseminating safety information.* Strategies include safety incident data collection and planning and access to dissemination of safety incident data.
3. *To establish new prevention /intervention strategies; to replicate successful prevention/intervention initiatives already present in schools.* Strategies include development of a curriculum/service delivery inventory, conflict resolution/violence prevention curriculum (see Section #2 above), peer mediation, and other strategies as additional funding is available, such as after school programs.
4. *To ensure that the Office of School Safety and the Office of Student Support Services forge a working relationship to improve our community and school climate.* The Reorganization Plan and establishment of a BPS Safety Committee are the leading strategies.

**Goal 3**

Provide safe, nurturing schools where students receive the support they need to succeed in school.

5. *To involve government, human service, and community-based agencies in addressing safety and human service issues affecting students and schools.* Strategies include Community-based Juvenile Justice, formation of a Citywide Safety Advisory Committee, and establishment of Educational Law/Juvenile Justice Forums.

6. *To implement the Memorandum of Agreement between the Boston Public Schools and the Boston Police Department.* The strategy establishes a new partnership between the two enforcement departments.

7. *To align safety and student support personnel and their responsibilities to the Boston Public Schools' reorganization needs.* Strategies will unfold as the Reorganization Plan is implemented.

8. *To expand alternative programs for disruptive students.* Strategies might include establishment of a transitional school for students re-entering BPS from DYS, redesign of the Barron Center program, expansion of the McKinley Learning/Adaptive Behavior (L/AB) cluster model, and consideration of a surround-care alternative school.

9. *To involve general counsel in the clarification, guidance, implementation, and training of staff on school legal issues and BPS policies and procedures.* Strategies include civil rights training for all appropriate staff.

The Community-Based Juvenile Justice Program (CBJ) brings together a variety of city agencies in support of student safety, including the Boston Police Department, Suffolk County District Attorney's Office, Department of Social Services, Department of Probation, Department of Youth Services, and the MBTA Police. These agencies hold regular meetings to discuss students who have fallen into the criminal justice system and require intervention and support. CBJ also identifies students who are at risk of falling into the criminal justice system so that intervention and support can be brought to bear on their behalf. CBJ is a nationally recognized community organizing model.

10. *To review and revise BPS selected procedures impacting safety and security.* Strategies include review of policies on overage and non-resident students, student record accuracy, students returning from expulsion, safety/discipline transfers, and school bus behavior policy.

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Boston Police Department and the Boston Public Schools establishes a full-time liaison to facilitate communication and responsiveness between our security and police services. Relationships with the Suffolk County District Attorney's office and the Office of the Massachusetts Attorney General are essential to a comprehensive approach to safety and will be aggressively pursued.

### 5. Develop options for students who truly need them.

Most schools, especially at the secondary level, enroll students who for a wide variety of reasons need a range of options which our own public schools cannot offer. To serve these students, we have collaborated closely over the years with a number of alternative programs. The School Department will work closely with the Mayor's office, community-based organizations, and appropriate public agencies to identify resources and create more options for students, both within the Boston Public Schools and among our collaborating community providers.

Established in 1987, Boston's Alternative Education Initiative comprises ten programs, including eight originating outside the School Department in community agencies. Two originated within the School Department and are operated by the Boston Public Schools. Altogether, these ten programs provide a capacity of approximately 700 seats in alternative diploma programs.

The eight community programs include EdCo, ESAC, EL Centro del Cardenal, Federated Dorchester Neighborhood Houses, Dorchester Youth Collaborative, St. Mary's Parenting Program, Crittenton-Hastings House and ABCD. The two BPS programs include Another Course to College and Community Academy. In addition, there are three "schools within a school" models currently operating at South Boston, East Boston, and English high schools, and a new pilot program with the Jobs Corps at West Roxbury High School.

In the past ten years, these alternatives have contributed significantly to a reduction of the overall dropout rate of the Boston Public Schools. Some of the programs receive funding, staff, or support from the School Department. All of them raise funds outside the school budget. The Alternative Education network provides a valuable service to the Boston Public Schools at a very low cost.

## GOAL 4: Engage parents, families and the community in school improvement through a unified collaborative structure and effective communication.

The Boston Public Schools through the BTU/BPS Contract, the Boston Compact, and active relationships with parent and community organizations is fortunate to have a set of tools and supports to more fully engage the public in the process of school improvement. A dilemma facing many schools is that the resources and relationships often are not working in concert, and the result is fragmentation and duplication. The Boston Public Schools will focus on improving teaching and learning and call upon the resources of the entire community to provide support targeted to this mission.

Specific strategies for public engagement include:

### 1. Involve all partners in the whole-school change process to effectively plan for more focus on teaching and learning.

We know intuitively that the relationship between schools and the larger context of their community is a

dynamic and powerful one: what happens in schools is a mirror of the society they serve. Schools forecast the future of their community through their impact on the economic, social, ethical, and emotional preparation of their graduates as citizens.

Because of this, schools must maintain active connections with their communities. Since 1982, Boston has been in the vanguard of American cities that have sought to organize a unified community framework for collaboration with their public schools. Many external groups and organizations have worked with the Boston Public Schools over the past several decades. The Boston Compact, however, has emerged as the principal collaborative framework through which a broad range of organizations pool their resources and influence to support school change.

**Goal 4**

Engage parents and the community in school improvement through a unified collaborative structure and effective communications.

The Compact originally was a business and higher education initiative that provided support for Boston Public School graduates in return for measurable improvements in academic performance, dropout reduction, student attendance, and preparation for careers and college. Since then, the Compact has gone through several revisions aimed at broadening its base of collaborators while working more closely with school leaders to deepen the connections between schools, businesses, colleges, parent groups, cultural groups, human service providers, and the city as a whole.

A new Compact agreement was signed in 1994 under the leadership of Mayor Thomas Menino, in which cultural organizations, human service providers, and parent groups were added to the collaborative framework for the first time, thus completing the circle of stakeholders committed to education reform.

### Alignment of Compact Goals and the Comprehensive Reform Plan

The Compact agreement of 1994 specified a set of goals and initiatives that call for the involvement of all sectors of the city. The community leaders who form the Compact developed a strategic plan which establishes the expectation that all collaborative efforts around the Boston schools will be ultimately measured in terms of student academic achievement. The centerpiece of the Compact strategy is a set of goals related directly to the schools calling for higher standards, new curricula, and new assessments, along with the professional development necessary to make the new standards achievable. The Compact also specifies the need for innovation at the school level while raising expectations for business and higher education to create more long-term opportunities for Boston graduates in return for improved schools.

The goals of the Boston Compact include:

1. Access to Higher Education and Careers
2. **Commitment to Innovation**
3. **High Standards, Curriculum and Assessments**
4. **Training and Professional Development**
5. Parent and Family Support and Involvement
6. New and Improved School Facilities

This Comprehensive Reform Plan is aimed at improving the Boston Public Schools to deliver on its commitments to achieve these overall community goals. The central goals of the Compact—school innovation, higher standards, curriculum and assessments, and professional development, highlighted in **bold typeface** above—correspond directly to the Priority Goal of this plan: Improved Teaching and Learning. The other three goals require broad support from all partners in the community, including the Boston Public Schools.

By focusing the resources, professional development, and student support activities into a single strategy for improving teaching and learning, the Boston Public Schools will deliver on its commitment to the other Compact partners to measurably improve student achievement.

There are two tasks schools and collaborative partners must accomplish together to help achieve the goals of this Plan. The first is to engage all partners at the school level in the whole-school change process and make them a part of ongoing school planning. The second is to refocus resources from partnerships on the teaching and learning process and integrate them with the whole-school plan.

### Collaborative Planning for Whole-School Change in Every School

While the Compact has provided a sense of unity and collaboration among the city's leadership, and while the many programs and initiatives that have emerged from the Compact have created a presence in the schools, there has been no unified, coordinated way in which the collaborative framework of the Compact has been directly connected to the planning and decision-making process in each school.

The Comprehensive School Reform Plans developed by each school should have a representative group of the school's partner organizations actively participating in the planning process.

Some steps have recently been taken to accomplish this. The presence of School-based Management/Shared Decision-making in each school creates the template for broader collaborative planning. Many School Site Councils now have business and university partners as *ex officio* members. The infrastructure is in place in many schools to broaden the organic planning process of the schools to include, along with teachers, parents, families, business and college partners, human service agencies, and cultural institutions. Each of these groups has a stake in the schools. Each is part of a formal agreement signed by city leadership. The framework is in place to create a much more collaborative change process in each school where the community, through its leading collaborative organizations, can be part of the process in every school.

### Focus for Resources through Partnerships

Schools have benefited from the generous support of the business and higher education communities since the inception of the Compact. Some of the most exciting showcase programs in many schools have been created through these partnerships. Boston has earned national recognition for its partnership efforts.

Many of these programs provide useful services to the schools. Their purposes, however, vary considerably, and many are not focused squarely on the school's primary mission of instruction. Schools as well as external partners have encouraged a fragmentation process within schools, creating many separate programs, with separate purposes, as add-ons to the basic school experience. These separate programs have an

opportunity cost to them, in the time required of school and partnership staff to operate them, and in the potential resources that might be otherwise directed to improving teaching and learning.

An essential part of this Comprehensive Reform Plan is the hope and expectation that schools and collaborative partners will rethink the entire corpus of our partnership efforts, and will refocus the resources and commitments on helping schools to improve academic instruction in the classroom. The means for doing this are in the planning for whole-school change. As already noted, this process must be inclusive of all aspects of each school's community.

**Goal 4**

Engage parents and the community in school improvement through a unified collaborative structure and effective communications.

Pet projects for a few students, or discrete sources of funds, gifts or in-kind services for a few classrooms, or the way of thinking that keeps private resources secret like a treasure trove for the benefit of a few—these ways of thinking need to change if schools and partners are to achieve the goal of better academic success for every student.

There are models throughout the city for business, cultural, higher education, health, and social service partnership initiatives that have direct impact on academic success. There is, however, no single model or initiative; the limits of our ability to use resources from all sectors of the community are limited only by the creativity of the people engaged in planning. We want schools to get out of the business of trying to do too many things, and of being seen as the place for solving all social issues. To the extent that external resources can be flexibly applied to support whole-school change, they will enable the Boston Public Schools to fulfill its part of the Compact.

**2. Plan and conduct an ongoing communications strategy for informing parents, families and other constituencies of the status, performance, and challenges of the schools.**

For much of the past two decades, information about the Boston Public Schools has not been fully accessible to the public. This is partly because there has been no clear strategy for communication, either within the School Department or with the external community. A history of conflict, particularly since 1974, may have had some role in this limited access. The Boston Public Schools has had a reputation that is mixed at best, and for the most part has been that of a cumbersome, top-heavy bureaucracy, unsafe schools, and poor academic results. Some of the reasons for this reputation are deserved; some are the result of limited access to the schools; and some have to do with stereotyping that characterizes the perception of all city schools by the public as a whole.

Changing these perceptions and stereotypes will only happen through a long-term, sustained strategy of school improvement. An effective, broad scale communications strategy that changes the perception of the Boston Public Schools begins with the precept that all of our schools have to be as good as we say they are. The overall quality of our schools and

services within them has to improve. People will only believe the schools as a whole are really changing for the better when they have first-hand experience to support that belief. Examples of excellence have been increasing in recent years. The emergence of schools such as the Timilty and the Mason, the sustained excellence of schools such as the Quincy and the Tobin, and the national acclaim for schools such as Boston Latin School and Fenway Middle College are promising signs that the big picture is improving as the schools themselves change.

Our communications strategy, both internal and external, has to be grounded in a fundamental commitment to being forthcoming, responsive, and truthful, to parents, families, media, collaborating organizations, and to each other. Our basic approach has to change: internally, from top-down, command and control, communication by circular and decree; and externally, from limiting information to only what suggests the best possible numbers or slant on what is actually happening. Our mode of operation has to emphasize two-way communication, where central office and school-based people engage together in regular sharing of information, and where both sides listen to one another.

Central to the strategy is a recognition that the best way for the media and the community as a whole to develop a more favorable impression of the schools is through more first-hand experiences of them. The only way to break down the stereotypes about Boston schools is to bring people into them so they can see for themselves. This has already begun to happen. If the product is better than its reputation, the word will spread. Internal, word-of-mouth channels are powerful avenues for communication, fueled by direct exposure.

Our communications strategy has three parts to it: internal communications, media relations, and community and partner communications. Each of these presumes a regular, sustained, forthcoming and responsive approach. Central to our communication will be a customer service orientation that characterizes all of our contact with people inside and outside the system.

An example of a commitment to two-way communication is the restructuring of the Superintendent's Council, made up of central administrators, into the new Leadership Team, half the members of which will be principals and headmasters. This helps to change the management process from a top-down approach to one where people working directly in the schools have both a forum and a newly defined role as instructional leaders.

### Internal Communication

The Boston Public Schools has produced in recent years a variety of disparate publications, brochures, and communication vehicles, virtually all of which have been to inform or showcase a particular program, initiative, zone, or project. While being valuable in themselves, they also tend to increase the public perception of the schools as a fragmented system working at cross purposes with itself. Along with a top-down communication strategy driven largely by central office circulars and dated checklists, this piecemeal approach has left our own employees very often in the dark about what each other is doing and what is happening that is really important to them.

The internal infrastructure of how we communicate has to change:

- Establish regular communications and publications, such as the weekly staff newsletter *Connections*, annual reports, and promotional material, that showcase the entire school system.
- Make full use of the new school clusters and other networks as systems for regular sharing of best

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practices among schools and of routine information shared in a collegial, professional way.

- Sharpen and rethink central office communications such as circulars and memoranda to emphasize two-way communication and an attitude of school support rather than command and control. This includes closely scrutinizing the volume of paperwork required of schools by the central office. Good communication should be brief and efficient, not cumbersome and onerous.
- Generate a systemwide events calendar so that all Boston Public Schools staff are aware of what is happening on a daily basis across the system.
- Coordinate *all* publications for better focus and best results, especially those among schools, central office, and parents and families.
- Use new technologies more fully and efficiently, such as E-mail and Internet.
- Use cable and other telecommunications avenues to connect with schools and establish connections between them.
- Train all personnel in good customer service skills, including telephone manners, prompt and clear contact, and responsive problem-solving as a central part of our commitment to two-way communication.

**Goal 4**

Engage parents and the community in school improvement through a unified collaborative structure and effective communications.

### External Communication—Media Relations

Our relationship with the media, print and electronic, will be characterized by sustained, professional contact that is open, helpful, and forthcoming. Credibility in our overall organization will be built over time through the same principles adhered to in our internal communications: good customer service and two-way communication. At their best, the media can provide a feedback process for the schools: while no one likes critical stories, the media give a clear picture of public interest and public perception of our work. Our primary goal with the media is to develop a level of cooperation and trust that leads to better public understanding about the strengths, shortcomings, and challenges facing the schools.

Maintaining media relationships will include:

- Media training for central and school-based staff, building capacity internally at all levels to understand media and to have reasonable expectations of the various media to serve different functions;
- Capacity building to respond to public inquiries quickly and openly, including readily available summaries of our work, status reports, and profiles of school-based activities;
- Dissemination of important data, wherever appropriate, including results of tests, surveys, and other documentation, so that reporting can be fully informed as well as timely;
- Access to staff at all levels so that information can be validated across departments and among different schools;
- Regular briefings between media and school leaders on educational issues and the progress of reform.

### Community, Families and Partners—Public Engagement

Information for parents and families as well as for the community and collaborating partners has been conducted primarily through external organizations and groups. This is a strength of our communications network. The Boston Public Schools has to become an active participant in that network, sharing information, encouraging access, and maintaining regular contact with external organizations.

Every adult is connected to the schools in some way—as a parent, relative, employer, or neighbor. Everyone who lives and works in the city will benefit from excellent schools.

Two-way communication between families and schools is particularly important.

- Parents and families will have opportunities to express themselves, their issues and concerns, through public forums, publications, and technology training.
- Working with school staff, parents and families will have opportunities to learn strategies and skills to support their children's learning at home.
- Communications to the home will be more clear, concise, and timely, especially material related to school selection and student assignment.
- High quality, frequent information will be available to parents and families, in many languages, on school performance through publications such as the School Report Cards.
- We will collaborate with the Greater Boston Real Estate Board to promote the strengths of the Boston Public Schools to parents, families, and others seeking residence in the city.
- We will build creative outreach campaigns to broaden the parent/family base.
- We will create innovative venues, such as curriculum study groups and call-in television programs to reach previously disengaged parents and families.

Lastly, an important feature of any good communications strategy is that genuine accomplishments be regularly and widely *celebrated*, through publications and especially through organized events (such as award ceremonies, formal presentations, and press conferences) so that the awareness of our successes becomes a pervasive aspect of our collective work.

## IV Conclusion

For the first time in many years, Boston is in the enviable position among American cities of having all of its key leadership committed to a unified strategy for school improvement. Mayor Thomas Menino, the Boston School Committee, and the collaborative partners are all focused now on improving the Boston Public Schools.

This will necessitate some hard choices for the city. We will have to make thoughtful, reasoned decisions about what we are prepared to do well rather than relying on the schools to solve all of society's problems. This will require closer coordination among all of our city's institutions to assure that our resources and energy support teaching and learning.

New demands will be put on *everyone* to work more closely together to support children, schools and classrooms. Teachers and school administrators will have to engage in a demanding process of planning, reflection and rigorous self-assessment if the whole-school change process is going to be truly effective in each school. Students must learn to work much harder, too; and they will need the support of their families and all of us as they undertake this challenge.

Most importantly, the new Citywide Learning Standards—the central reform measure driving school improvement—set a new level of expectations for the system. Establishing a credible baseline may mean that test results and other assessments will temporarily drop, as more demanding instruments are used. We will need to be honest in sharing results, clear in our expectations for staff, students, parents, families and the community, and vigorous in our efforts to restructure all of our work to improve teaching and learning.

This is a time when everyone who is concerned about public education needs to come together and rally around our students. Results will not be achieved immediately. Organic school reform, professional development, and new methods of teaching will take several years to show impact. Advocacy and critical thinking are a necessary and energizing part of change. But cynicism, negative thinking, and old bitterness must be put aside.

Making every school in the city a learning community of excellence requires a renewal of hope and optimism about the schools in every sector of the city. Educational change can be painful; but it is not mysterious. We know what it takes to make schools work more effectively. Sustained, patient leadership and support at every level, a concentrated focus on developing new teaching strategies, high standards with the supports for students to achieve them, and a commitment to rethink every practice and to evaluate our efforts based on accurate data—these elements will help students to learn better and schools to produce better results.

With our leadership united, our schools prepared for the hard work of change, and our community *focused on children* and committed to a unified vision of improving teaching and learning, our optimism is as well founded as it is essential to the process of change. ❧

# NOTES